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Empathy's Place in America's Concentration Camps:
Allegiance: A New American Musical and the *Drama in the Delta* Video Game

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The impetus to create a 3D role-playing video game about the Japanese American internment experience¹—and my interest in a Broadway-bound musical on the same topic currently being developed for a September 2012 premiere at San Diego's Old Globe Theatre—came from the activist shock of reading Stephen Duncombe's 2007 book *Dream: Re-Imagining Progressive Politics in an Age of Fantasy*. Duncombe argues that the populist energy and myth-embodying power of commercial ventures like the *Grand Theft Auto* 3D role-playing games (3D RPGs) and Las Vegas's live spectacles of simulation should be harnessed by progressive activists to engage the public through participation, pleasure, and fantasy.² Of course Duncombe acknowledges that the *Grand Theft Auto* (GTA) series turns "spectators into producers" in the service of decidedly anti-progressive politics; for instance, *GTA: San Andreas* allows players to embody a young, poor black man named CJ in order to deliver the stereotypical "gangsta rap antihero made virtual flesh" (73, 59). However, Duncombe believes that the commercial gaming exchange suggests "a desire within us to identify

¹ In the wake of the Japanese Empire's attack on the U.S. naval base at Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941, President Franklin Roosevelt authorized the forced evacuation and internment of almost 120,000 Japanese Americans from the West Coast because they were considered, en masse, threats to national security. Two-thirds of these internees were American citizens by birth (known as Nisei, or second-generation) and about one-third were immigrants who had been living in the United States for decades but were prohibited from gaining naturalized citizenship (the immigrant generation was known as Issei). After temporary incarceration at various assembly centers, Japanese American internees were imprisoned in ten permanent relocation centers, including the camps called Heart Mountain (Wyoming), Jerome (Arkansas), Manzanar (California), and Rohwer (Arkansas), each addressed in this paper.

² Various theatre scholars have also proffered the connection between virtual embodiment and live performance: David Saltz argues that "the way current digital artists valorize the concept of 'interactivity' relates closely to the way theatre and performance artists have long valorized the concept of 'liveness'" (107) and Sue-Ellen Case connects the "immersive space" of virtual embodiment with the "characterological space" of live performance through their shared inheritance of the spiritual concept of "avatar" (163). Chris Salter also touches on this connection in his new book *Entangled*.

with what we are not” and “make the Other, literally, *identifiable* and thus not an ‘other’ at all” (58–9). Without defending *GTA*, Duncombe insists that the “immense popularity of a game in which the player identifies with someone demonized as a menace to society says something about an untapped capacity for politics which crosses boundaries [...] through the more radical action of empathy with and action as the Other” (59). Likewise, Duncombe sees the empathetic possibilities of the spectacular simulations staged on the Las Vegas Strip that invite “the active participation of as many people as possible,” even though these commodified performances have heretofore served to advance global capitalism rather than mobilizing consumers toward hope or change (71). Despite the dominant values of the most lucrative 3D RPGs and live simulations, Duncombe believes an *ideological* exchange can take place if progressive activists perform “ethical spectacles” in which dreams of social justice are “self-consciously enacted” by producers and spectators alike (173).

Yet the *ethical* exchange of Duncombe’s deal with the devil is by no means assured, as critiques like Lisa Nakamura’s characterization of cross-racial cyber role-play as “identity tourism” (13) and Saidiya Hartman’s characterization of empathic identification in live performance as “an obliteration of the other” (7) make abundantly clear.³ Indeed, despite shared intentions of exposing the injustice of the racist World War II internment policy and universalizing the humanity of the (Japanese) Americans who lived through the U.S. concentration camps, both the 3D RPG *Drama in the Delta* that I am developing at the University of California, San Diego, and the Broadway-bound spectacle *Allegiance: A New American Musical* have been accused of commodifying racial trauma and trivializing the experience of racial minorities. On her blog “Walking and Talking,” Nancy Matsumoto relates the “squeamish uncertainty” with which many in the “Japanese American community” apprehend the musical *Allegiance*. Matsumoto writes, “is this going to be a *Springtime for*

³ I will touch on both Nakamura’s and Hartman’s critiques later in this paper and address them at length in the article version of this essay.

Hitler-like attempt at concentration camp musical theater? Turning deeply resonant Issei sayings (*shikata-ga-nai*/ “it can’t be helped,” *gaman*/ “persevere, do your best”) into the lyrics for a Broadway-style song-and-dance musical at first struck me as bizarre, and slightly cringe inducing” (although once she saw a workshop performance of *Allegiance* her concerns were mostly assuaged).

Likewise, the *Drama in the Delta* game prototype was released just months after the *Sonderkommando Revolt* Holocaust video game controversy, which provided a cautionary tale for RPGs that engage World War II atrocities. Announced in December 2010 and slated for a January 2011 release, *Sonderkommando Revolt* is an Israeli-developed “mod” (modification) of the classic first-person shooter (FPS) game *Wolfenstein 3D*; the new game reenacts the October 1944 prisoner uprising at the Auschwitz extermination camp and allows the player to embody the perspective of Zalmen Gradowski, an actual Jewish prisoner. *Sonderkommando Revolt* was not intended to be historically accurate or educational, rather filling the commercial niche of revenge fantasy games: game developers planned to allow the avatar Zalmen to prevail over his Nazi captors, in contrast to the failed historic uprising (in reality only 3 Nazis were killed in contrast to 451 Jews). When the game developers announced their upcoming release to the Anti-Defamation League for comment, a spokesperson condemned the project: “Perhaps well intentioned in its creation, its execution and imagery are horrific and inappropriate [...] The Holocaust should be off-limits for video games. We hope the developers will reconsider and abandon the game” (quoted in Crecente). The developers cancelled the planned release of the Holocaust-themed game within weeks. Just months after the web buzzed with alarmist *Sonderkommando Revolt* headlines such as the curt title “The Concentration Camp Video Game” (McWhertor), the release of the *Drama in the Delta* prototype on our project website (<http://dramainthedelta.org>) prompted a new wave of sometimes skeptical Internet chatter

such as the article titled “Japanese American Internment: The Video Game” (Angry Asian Man).⁴ Online critiques often presumed that the internment, like the Holocaust, “should be off-limits for video games”; critics made the implicit connection in pithy dismissals such as my personal favorite, “The screenshots from the trial look a bit like Dora the Explorer meets Schindler’s List” (8Asians), presumably because the *Drama in the Delta* prototype level’s player-character, a young Nisei girl named Jane, wears her hair like the cartoon character Dora and also wears a Dora-esque backpack (the *Schindler’s List* connection is sadly obvious) (**Figure 1**).

We may put aside the tenuous logic that conflates the U.S. concentration camps for Japanese Americans and the Nazi extermination camps for Jews and other persecuted minorities (for this reason I will, from this point forward, refer to the Japanese American camps as “internment camps” instead of “concentration camps” to widen this rhetorical gap). We may also put aside the fact that most such questioning of *Allegiance* and *Drama in the Delta* transpires before critics have witnessed the musical or game in action. Nonetheless, there are admittedly genuine grounds for concern that the genres of Broadway musical theatre and digital role-play cannot overcome the objectification of the raced body, particularly of the Asian (American) body, that has dominated both of their short histories. **In this white paper I argue that the state of national consciousness about the internment calls for radically empathetic—and perhaps ethically risky—interventions like *Allegiance* and *Drama in the Delta*, and I question whether their respective genres’ histories of dehumanizing Asian characters can be exchanged for anti-racist agendas for the future. I will introduce a concept of *critical empathy* as a mode of imagined embodiment that foregrounds the historic failure of empathy while simultaneously challenging spectators to identify with the other by self-consciously enacting the temporality of empathy: a**

⁴ Angry Asian Man’s article turned out to be thoughtful and enthusiastic about the *Drama in the Delta* concept, but the headline alone was reposted in many places (including Facebook pages) without the additional context. Much of this press coverage resulted from a June 8, 2011 *Chronicle of Higher Education* article by Ben Wieder, “Researchers’ Video Game Puts Players in Japanese-American Internment Camps.”

temporality that demands uncomfortably walking in another's shoes to project the buried past into the endangered future.

I imagined *Drama in the Delta* as a way of “Building Empathy for WWII Incarceration, One Game Level at a Time” (to crib the headline of what was otherwise a less-than-glowing article on the project published in the Asian American newspaper *Pacific Citizen*).⁵ Decades of research on internment history have highlighted the failure of empathy that prevented Americans from identifying (with) their neighbors of Japanese descent as fellow Americans entitled to civil liberties. My earlier work had argued that the unconstitutional internment came to pass because the U.S. government and mass media framed the anti-Japanese policy as a political spectacle that excused non-Japanese Americans from empathizing with those of Japanese descent, regardless of citizenship status.⁶ A half century later, well-intentioned representations of internment history such as the Smithsonian’s 1987 exhibit *A More Perfect Union: Japanese Americans and the U.S. Constitution* demonstrate that the state of national consciousness has not changed much in terms of identifying with the Japanese American other. As Ingrid Gessner points out, the Smithsonian’s *A More Perfect Union* represented the internment experience “in a movie-set style, conveying a sense of place and movement that was at the same time removed from reality because of the Hollywood appeal” (245). The exhibit offered life-sized cardboard cutouts (as well as projected figures) of internees lined up

⁵ Ever since I began imagining a 3D RPG set in the internment camps, colleagues have asked how my project compares with the virtual-reality installation *Beyond Manzanar* (ca. 2000) by artists Tamiko Thiel and Zara Houshmand. I treat this comparison in the longer version of this essay. For this seminar paper, suffice it to say that *Drama in the Delta* departs most dramatically from Thiel and Houshmand’s life-sized room projection—in which spectators explore a virtual-reality reconstruction of the Manzanar internment camp using joystick navigation—in terms of the perspective users embody in each project. In *Beyond Manzanar*, Thiel and Houshmand purposely eschewed a “character-centered narrative viewpoint” by not including Japanese American internees (or other historical actors) as avatars and instead allowing spectators to experience the camp from the first-person perspective to stage an encounter between spectators and the camp’s desert landscape (Thiel 153). By contrast, the *Drama in the Delta* project inherently requires users to challenge their empathic capabilities by embodying raced avatars through third-person gameplay perspective. Of course, *Drama in the Delta* also reconstructs two camps in Arkansas (instead of California’s infamous Manzanar), namely the virtually forgotten Rohwer and Jerome camps.

⁶ The extended version of this argument can be found in Roxworthy, *The Spectacle of Japanese American Trauma: Racial Performativity and World War II* (University of Hawaii Press, 2008).

for forced relocation, but objectified these Japanese Americans by placing them behind glass along with artifacts such as suitcases. Smithsonian spectators thus apprehended World War II internees as distanced racial objects rather than intimate fellow subjects, even as they were directed through the exhibit as if “symbolically retracing the steps of former Japanese American internees” (ibid.).

Present-day spectators’ own subjectivity was reified while foreclosing that of the historical actors. Moreover, the curatorial team tried to “fight prejudice” by instilling a distinct military overtone to the exhibit (which was also located on the Smithsonian’s military history floor) as if the only way to sympathetically present Japanese Americans was to emphasize their contributions to the U.S. military, in the form of the segregated Japanese American 442nd Regimental Combat Team, the most decorated unit in World War II. As Gessner puts it, the “life-sized diorama of the [Nisei] soldiers firing a mortar” had a “stage-set quality [that] might even have prevented any identification with the situation and was, in fact, more reminiscent of a piece of scenery from a theme park attraction” (248). In the final analysis, *A More Perfect Union* excused its spectators from the imperative to empathize with what Gessner aptly describes as “the heartbreak” of the internment experience (249). The Smithsonian’s foreclosure of empathy is just one example of a multitude of internment representations that prompted me to propose a 3D RPG about the camp experience.

On the most simplistic level, role-play gaming requires that spectators (or “users”) embody player-characters different than themselves, although these days the producers of most virtual worlds bow to commercial pressures by allowing their customers to customize their avatars to favor their physicality or their personal fantasies. As a non-profit, educational RPG funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), *Drama in the Delta* could require that spectators embody a diverse cast of historically accurate characters, and play these characters as third-person avatars. (In gaming, third-person camera angle refers to a player perspective in which the avatar-body is visible as the player virtually stands behind the character throughout gameplay, for instance

see Figure 1). *Drama in the Delta*'s title refers to the unique geopolitical location of the Rohwer and Jerome internment camps where the game is set: these two sites were located in the Arkansas Delta and so were the only Japanese American camps located in a former Confederate state. When the Jim Crow segregation laws of the South came in contact with the anti-Japanese policies of the wartime internment, a particularly complex racial triangulation between Southern whites, African Americans, and West Coast Japanese emerged. Set in 1944, each of the game's levels is staged from a different historical actor's perspective, and the player's movements are circumscribed by the given avatar's racial status, citizenship, and gender. Avatars include Jane (a 14-year-old Nisei internee), Willy (a black laborer and blues musician), Kenji (a Nisei soldier from Hawaii), and Frank (a white Arkansan who works in the camp administration) (**Figure 2**). If, as Adriano D'Aloia argues, simulated environments stage encounters between a player's actual and virtual selves, then the *Drama in the Delta* spectator must negotiate a series of encounters with this diverse cast of roles in a self-conscious mode enabled by the opaque role-play of the third-person "avatarial camera" (as opposed to the transparent seamlessness of first-person perspective, as epitomized by lucrative FPS games such *Call of Duty*) (52-3). The constructed nature of *Drama in the Delta*'s racial role-play is also apparent to spectators because avatars like Kenji and Willy are not the characters that commercial games usually encourage identification with or grant subjectivity to; as with *Grand Theft Auto*, African American game characters are generally posed as one-dimensional thugs, and war-themed first-person shooters invariably pose Asians as ape-like villains (see *Call of Duty*, *Medal of Honor*, and *Homefront* for examples). As Lisa Nakamura puts it, racial minorities are usually digitized as "cybertypes," reflecting "the distinctive ways that the Internet propagates, disseminates, and commodifies images of race and racism" (3). *Drama in the Delta* tries to counter these cybertypes with historically accurate game characters whose perspectives have often been obscured.

Drama in the Delta also defuses the problem of “autoempathy” that D’Aloia identifies—in which digital role-play merely reifies the spectator’s self-identity and self-serving biases—by disallowing empathy with a single perspective. In their critique of violent gaming, Edward Vieira and Marina Krcmar claim that “in a video game, players are encouraged to see only one point of view—that of the violent perpetrator. More importantly, this sense of simple view point is enhanced because it is the perspective of the player” and “the target of the violence is often perceived as an object, without substance, and is dehumanized” (116). Vieira and Krcmar argue that this singular point of view erodes gamers’ sense of empathy by discouraging other perspective-taking and rewarding dehumanization and destruction of the other. On the other hand, Saidiya Hartman claims that perspective-taking through identification with the other is itself a form of violence. “Properly speaking,” Hartman writes, “empathy is a projection of oneself into another in order to better understand the other” and the racial violence of slavery’s legacy in American culture is reproduced in “the slipping on of blackness or an empathic identification in which one substitutes the self for the other” (18-19, 7). While *Drama in the Delta* spectators engage in racial role-play in order to identify with the other in internment history, the shifting perspective of the game’s levels multiplies this otherness, thus rendering empathic perspective-taking both difficult (because ever-shifting and opaque) and necessary to success in the game. I call this ambivalence *critical empathy* and I hope its effective in achieving change.

The internment camp setting and segregation rules of the virtual environment also foreground critical empathy. Surrounded by barbed wire and seven military guardtowers, the Jerome and Rohwer camps each contained block upon block of internee barracks that were hastily constructed in the Arkansas Delta. Each 500-acre camp was desolate and redundant, with the repetitive, boxed-in quality of camp life (lining up for every conceivable purpose, circumscribed within often arbitrary U.S. government policies) reconstructed from blueprints, photographs, and

other archival accounts for *Drama in the Delta*'s 3D models (**Figure 3**). In other words, playing this game prototype can be tedious, lonely, repetitive, and frustrating. Unlike the utopian fantasy that characterizes (and sells) the Internet and commercial RPGs, *Drama in the Delta* spectators cannot choose or customize their virtual identities, their avatars are not endowed with superpowers like the ability to kill with impunity, and they cannot explore an ever-entertaining social world at their leisure. In short, embodiment in an internment camp RPG is a drag, or a “lag” as Tom Boellstorff puts it in his appraisal of *Second Life*'s inability to virtualize time (102): despite the utopian promises of technology, the user is constantly made aware of digital limitations and the fact that new technology cannot supercede old technologies like aging hardware, or, more to our point, racism. This ill fit between the future-oriented contemporary and the presumed obsolescence of the past enables what I would call *empathy's temporality*: instead of the omniscience and transcendence privileged in the virtual world, RPG interactions that stage the disjunction between technological powers and sociopolitical realities create awareness of the inextricable relationship of the past to the future-oriented present. *Drama in the Delta* performs empathy's temporality by frustrating the consumer expectation that 3D game technology will enable spectators to digitally shrug off the injustices presumably relegated to the analog past. Within this desolate, depressing game space, I decided to reenact historic performances⁷ such as a cross-generational Kabuki show (performed by Nisei girls instead of Issei men) and an interracial gathering of musicians in order to imagine moments in which segregational policies were resisted. However, these performances of agency and escape remain within a prison context surrounded by military presence and barbed wire, emphasizing the “pain to others [that] is largely minimized or ignored” in commercial RPGs (Vieira and Krcmar 126). The “heartbreak” of internment must be felt.

⁷ These resistant historic performances are presented as cinematic “cut scenes” that reward spectators at the completion of each level's mission. For instance, the prototype's “level 0” mission Jane's Favor ends with a cut scene in which Jane performs a farewell ritual as her friend Akiko's train departs the Jerome camp.

The musical *Allegiance* performs empathy's temporality through the elderly Nisei protagonist Sam Omura's flashback from the present-day to his heartbreaking internment at the Heart Mountain camp in Wyoming. "Old Sam" is played by George Takei (of *Star Trek* fame) and "Young Sam" is played by Telly Leung (of *Glee* fame); this doubled casting embodies the opaque temporality I associate with critical empathy because the spectator is always aware of past and present. Moreover, *Allegiance* troubles Old Sam's presumed temporal identification as the successful contemporary heir of past struggles to assimilate into the American Dream. As Andrea Most and other scholars of musical theatre have argued, the Broadway-style musical relies on "assimilation effects" to enable the audience's empathy with ethnic minorities, always on the condition that these ethnic characters embrace the utopian American Dream by performing virtuosic displays of self-invention (Most 9). Stacy Wolf shows "that Rodgers and Hammerstein *created* the Broadway musical as we know it" and these origins are marked by Asian objectification: "*South Pacific* and other musical plays of Rodgers and Hammerstein that represent Asian cultures in order to take on serious social issues and argue for tolerance—*Flower Drum Song* and *The King and I*—ultimately objectify the nonwhite characters under the guise of liberal universality. Although these musicals feature Asian characters, they erase the specificity of Asian cultures to prove that underneath everyone is alike and should behave according to American cultural values" (Wolf 6, 10).⁸ Historically, the Broadway musical has presented Asian characters as candidates for empathy only if they successfully performed what Christina Klein called (in reference to the Asian Americans of the original 1961 *Flower Drum Song*) a convincing "spectacle of assimilation" (231). In *Allegiance*, the audience is first introduced to the highly assimilated Old Sam in the present-day, when he is clearly embittered and alone, suggesting the false equation of assimilation with the American Dream. The musical then flashes back to the

⁸ In *Making Americans: Jews and the Broadway Musical*, Andrea Most suggests that Oscar Hammerstein's famous liberalism did not extend to Asian Americans: "Despite Hammerstein's passionate rejection of racial stereotypes for Jews, blacks, Irish, and Italians, he notably (and perhaps logically, considering wartime attitudes toward the Japanese) neglects to include Asians in his group" (162).

World War II past, where the audience witnesses Young Sam faithfully casting himself in spectacles of assimilation that support the U.S. government's internment policy—such as writing pro-Americanization editorials for the camp newspaper and joining the segregated all-Nisei 442nd Regimental Combat Team to prove Japanese American loyalty—but that alienate him further and further from the musical community onstage, garnering acceptance neither from his diegetic audience (his fellow characters) nor from the theatrical audience in the darkened house. Meanwhile, those characters who resist the government's forced Americanization policy, including Sam's traditional Issei parents, his white girlfriend Hannah, and his Japanese-language tutor Gloria (more on her later), come together as the type of “stage community” celebrated by musical theatre.

Allegiance's questioning of assimilationist spectacles not only critiques Broadway's usual condition for racialized empathy, but also renders temporal shifts opaque by interrupting the American Dream's usual progressive narrative: Old Sam is no happier or more successful for having re-invented himself as a super-patriot. Present-day Sam has not transcended the injustices of the past; instead, the injustice of the internment past haunts Old Sam and must be redressed in the musical's plot.

Rebecca Ann Rugg writes that Broadway musicals serve as “one of America's primary vehicles of cultural mythmaking” in large part because they commodify nostalgia, including the comforting “personal nostalgia” of familiar songs and cast members (47, 50). The *Allegiance* pre-Broadway marketing strategy includes circulating numbers from the musical's score using cast videos posted on Facebook, YouTube, and the show website (<http://www.allegiancemusical.com>)—creating a sense of familiarity even for a new musical—and casting familiar faces including television stars George Takei and Telly Leung (as mentioned above) as well as Broadway stars Lea Salonga and Jose Llana. However, I argue that the familiar musical citations of the *Allegiance* score⁹ and the

⁹ The *Allegiance* book and music are constantly being revised in advance of their Old Globe premiere next year. For this paper, I have used the most recent script the producers have made available to me (based on an October 2010 staged

recirculation of familiar actors in this musical's cast critique Broadway's fundamental nostalgia in order to perform critical empathy. *Allegiance*'s authors, Jay Kuo and Lorenzo Thione, trouble the score's nostalgia by connecting Broadway's history to sinister characters rather than sympathetic ones. For instance, Kuo and Thione depict the infamous Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) national secretary Mike Masaoka—"the only 'real' character portrayed in *Allegiance*" according to the show's website—as a caricature of old Broadway, writing that he "*appears, dressed in vaudevillian attire*" (19). Dubbed "Moses Masaoka" because he led his people out of California and the rest of the West Coast by encouraging cooperation in the forced evacuation and internment, Paolo Montalban plays Mike as a vaudeville showman who revels in the slippery artifice of musical spectacle and questions the very possibility of knowing the "truth" (23). Mike Masaoka's character-revealing song "Better Americans in a Greater America" celebrates the U.S. government's anti-Japanese internment policy with old-school Broadway gestures including winking at the audience and brandishing "jazz hands" (YouTube).

Throughout most of *Allegiance*, Masaoka appears as a well-dressed ghost that tempts Old Sam to turn his back on the past and its promise of revealing a dark secret; the other ghost who figuratively sits on Sam's shoulder—wearing an artless sundress in contrast to Masaoka's contrived suit-and-tie—is the Nisei character Gloria, whom Kuo and Thione describe as "the author of *Allegiance*" (2). The musical starts with Gloria's present-day death, and Old Sam learning that he has inherited Gloria's unpublished memoir detailing their time together as internees at Heart Mountain. Gloria's ghost appears to Old Sam and encourages him to travel back to the past with her to learn the truth about their wartime incarceration. Already Gloria has broken from the conventional Asian female role offered on Broadway: instead of the "classic stereotype of the exotic Oriental woman"

reading) and the most recent musical performances posted online (based on 2010-11 performances). I have also interview book co-author Lorenzo Thione.

typified by Liat in Rodgers and Hammerstein's *South Pacific*—silent, “one-dimensional, and largely without agency” (Most 158)—*Allegiance* offers a Japanese American female character with a voice. Gloria is credited as the “author of *Allegiance*”; she not only speaks, she speaks out against the American mythology of assimilation normally projected by Broadway spectacles. Moreover, by casting Tony Award winner Lea Salonga as Gloria, Kuo and Thione showcase this reinvention of Asian subjectivity because, up to this point, Salonga's Broadway career has been cast with a series of Liat's inheritors.

Until *Allegiance*, Salonga has played a string of submissive, exotic objects descended from *Madama Butterfly*'s Cio-Cio San, most famously originating the Butterfly role of Kim, the Vietnamese girl who sacrifices herself for the love of a white GI in the blockbuster West End and Broadway musical *Miss Saigon*, for which Salonga won the Tony for Best Actress in a Musical (**Figure 4**). Angela Pao describes Salonga's performance in *Miss Saigon* as passive, beautiful, and pure: necessary to fulfill Kim's “contract with the spectator [which] stipulates that she appear to be unaware of our presence so that we may more effectively believe in the tragedy of her love and death” (35). As Wolf points out, Broadway stars (like Salonga) can become “haunted” by an “originary performance” (like Kim in *Miss Saigon*): “A star plays more than one character; thus, certain characters become identified with her, and the repetition of her body across characters then links the characters as part of her star persona” (Wolf 36). In her latest starring role as a Nisei internee who becomes part of the resistance at Heart Mountain and defies the government's policy of forced Americanization, Salonga's “star persona” puts the legacy of mythologized Asian objects on the Broadway musical stage in dialogue with the reimagined Asian subject in *Allegiance* (**Figures 5-6**). But as an act of critical empathy, this reinvention is not celebratory. Instead, the audience is challenged to empathize not with a Butterfly-figure that bolsters the musical theatre's myth of American exceptionalism, but

with an anti-assimilationist Japanese-language tutor who openly criticizes the American Dream and resists the U.S. government.

Perhaps the most confrontational way in which *Allegiance* performs critical empathy is through Kuo and Thione's decision to include a chorus of "white citizens" that mirror the whiteness of traditional Broadway audiences. Rugg believes that one of the nostalgic appeals of musical theatre is the comforting spectacle of a "historically simplified America" in which everyone is the same and everyone gets along (45). In *Allegiance*, such nostalgia is a trap, not a refuge, because the illusion of sameness and acceptance that opens the musical—as these "white citizens" congenially mingle with the Omura family in the days before Pearl Harbor—proves to be ephemeral. *Allegiance* stages the failure of empathy that led to the internment through these white citizens' performance of how quickly they forget their friendships with Japanese Americans and fall into rehearsed step with the spectacle of racialization represented by the violent song-and-dance number "A Jap Is a Jap" (Kuo and Thione 14). In order for the anticipated audience to enjoy identification with *Allegiance's* Japanese American protagonists, they must disidentify with the villainous white chorus that turns its collective back on the Omura. They must bear witness to the dangerous role that theatricality (such as Masaoka's vaudevillian call to cooperate in the unconstitutional internment policy) and the seductive spectacles of American mythology play in the foreclosure of empathy toward those considered "other." Meditating on the Broadway musical's foreclosure of empathy interrupts the usual sales pitch that the musical theatre is a liberal refuge for fellow feeling.

Conclusion

In the coming year, we will be able to fully assess the impact of *Drama in the Delta* and *Allegiance* as highly engaging tools that simultaneously demand **critical empathy** toward both a challenging American historical narrative and toward the role of these entertainment media (video gaming and musical theatre, respectively) in our society. *Drama in the Delta* must negotiate its future

development now that the game prototype has been published and vetted in numerous popular and scholarly reviews. *Allegiance* must navigate its fall 2012 world premiere at a major regional theatre company and then position itself for a 2013 Broadway transfer, all the while balancing the commercial imperative of the box office with progressive educational goals. The possibilities for both projects' future development are exciting but fraught with pitfalls that this white paper has attempted to document.

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Figures



Figure 1. Nisei internee-avatar Jane viewed in third-person perspective, as she approaches one of the Jerome camp's seven military guard towers in the *Drama in the Delta* game prototype. The barbed wire fence around the camp's perimeter is visible in the background, as is a text box with archival photo and information about this feature of the internment.



Figure 2. Player avatar Jane encounters non-player character (NPC) John, an African American avatar who becomes a player character in a subsequent level of *Drama in the Delta*.



Figure 3. The desolate, depressing barracks environment of the Jerome camp in the *Drama in the Delta* game prototype.



Figure 4. Lea Salonga as Kim in the original Broadway cast of *Miss Saigon*.



Figure 5. Lea Salonga (Gloria Suzuki) performs in a workshop performance of *Allegiance* with Jose Llana (James Omura), also her love interest in the 2002 Broadway revival of *Flower Drum Song*.



Figure 6. Salonga (Mei Li) and Llana (Wang Ta) as the romantic couple David Henry Hwang's 2002 Broadway "revisical" of Rodger and Hammerstein's *Flower Drum Song*. Salonga's role as Mei Li and other submissive Asian women haunts her resistant role as Gloria in the Broadway-bound *Allegiance*.

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